musical ear as sheer cacophony, but to me they harmonized marvelously with the star-studded sky and the pitch-dark forest spangled with sparks of fires.

We crossed an immense camp. People were sitting around the fires, roasting meat over glowing charcoal, drinking wine, and singing. They drank from wineskins as in the time of Homer. As long as the bag was full, it produced a red or amber jet at a slight pressure, but we also saw a man press the wineskin under his knees to extract its last drop of liquid. And we saw an old man showing some youths how their forefathers used to drink. He was tall and stout, with snow-white hair and a full beard, and wore a long Caucasian robe with a silver belt and two strings of cartridges on his breast. He lifted the wineskin, containing perhaps two gallons of wine, high above his head and pressed it expertly so that the red jet ran directly into his open mouth, without loss of a single drop. To judge from the rapturous expression on the spectators' faces, this must have been a difficult trick.

Finally we reached the monastery. The church, more than five hundred years old, was built like the keep of a medieval castle—a square tower with loopholes for archers. Its spire was crowned by a cross. The building was all white or looked so in the light of the hundreds of campfires around it. The wall encircling it, also white, was more than fifteen feet high. Roofs of buildings inside the enclosure could be seen above the wall. A towerlike structure guarded the entrance.

We were knocking at the gate of an enchanted castle in an enchanted forest. Georgian kings of olden times, warlike and pious, had erected it as a stronghold of Christianity for the missionaries who preached the Gospel among the Moslem mountaineers and for the troops guarding the frontier. Here lay the boundary between the Christian kingdom in the lowlands and the tribes settled further to the north in inaccessible canyons. And it became the custom for both highlanders and lowlanders to assemble once a year around the cloister for a feast of peace and brotherhood. The Christian monastery had received a Moslem name and preserved it through the centuries, outliving the old kingdoms. The mayor did not know to what Christian saint the church had been dedicated or what the religious name of the monastery was; since childhood he had known this place only as Allah Verdi.

A bearded monk greeted us at the entrance. The mayor asked him for a room in the monastery guesthouse for us, his friends from Tiflis.

"All the rooms are gone, brother," answered the monk. "We have twenty persons to a room. Not an inch left." But he rushed to report our arrival to the Father Superior. We waited at the gate in the circle of fires, deafened by thousands of voices and the clangor of unknown musical instruments. Strange shadows moved through firelight, slender